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CIA recruiter meets students, says little

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IOWA CITY — A CIA recruiter conducting job interviews on the University of Iowa campus Thursday told protesters he doesn't agree with what they are saying, but he "will defend to the death your right to say it."

That was the conclusion to an afternoon punctuated by minor scuffles and pointed words, involving a coalition of student and non-student protesters called CIA Off Campus.

The CIA recruiter conducted interviews at the U of I Career Placement Center all day Wednesday and Thursday.

He agreed to speak with coalition representatives after they vehemently protested his presence on campus. However, he would not identify himself or permit photographers in the room during his three-minute meeting with protesters.

Protesters asked the recruiter nine questions, to which he did not respond. He earlier warned them through U of I Vice President of Student Services Philip Hubbard, that he "was not qualified" to answer any questions or make any comments.

"Are you here to recruit students to become criminal accomplices in an organization that considers itself exempt from the restraints of national and international law?" coalition representatives asked the recruiter.

"As an employee of the CIA, do you feel a personal responsibility for CIA spies, terrorism and genocide, or . . . are you just following orders?"

CIA Off Campus member Michael Price, a U of I senior, said the coalition won a "minor victory," but that they will be back to protest if the CIA returns.

The protest began with a noon rally on the Pentacrest, featuring speakers such as Vern Lyons, a former CIA recruiter and case worker.

Lyons noted CIA recruiters used to be on campuses at night, but now they place ads in newspapers to attract applicants and wear three-piece suits.

The CIA recruiter is "a wolf in sheep's clothing," Lyons said.

Not all of the 50 or so people who weathered the cold rain were there to espouse opposition to the CIA's presence.

"You don't represent the views of this campus," U of I student Jim Brady yelled at protesters. Brady said the protesters have no right to determine who students should interview with for jobs.

The group then marched down the hill to the Iowa Memorial Union, where the Career Placement Center is located.

"We have a right to go up those stairs," one protester said when they were denied access to the second floor.

Chants of "I-O-W-A, you're in bed with the CIA," broke out, and one woman asked U of I administrators and security guards who blocked the steps, "Why are you building a fortress around the CIA?"

Carol Snell-Feikema and her 5-year-old daughter, Teresa, slipped past the security guards and were ushered down a corridor of doors and out another exit.

"They told me I was going to be able to talk to the recruiter," she said when she returned.

Phillip Jones, U of I dean of student services, at one point wrangled with a protester who jumped over a table used to block the stairs.

It looked like a full-blown brawl would break out when protesters lunged for the stairs, but security officials pushed them back.

Robert Engel, a U of I associate professor who helped former U of I President Willard Boyd deal with the 1970s protests, also appeared at Thursday's protest.

"If you try to get up those stairs without an appointment with the CIA . . . you'll be arrested" and also charged under the student code, Engel said.

"Those who want to use resource files (in the placement office) can go one person at a time."

The protesters disbanded after an hour of blocking the stairwell.